

MADELINE GETS MARRIED
A THREE ACT PLAY

THE SEQUEL TO
AUNT BOBBIE JUNE'S TEA ROOM

BY
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CAST:

BOBBIE JUNE
MADELINE
DOSSIE MARIE
DIXIE LOU
HATTIE MAE
MARY -- THE YOUNG WOMAN

NANCY NEON – TELEVISION SOCIETY REPORTER
LAZARUS CHEATWOOD – DECEASED CURMUDGEON AND ALL AROUND
MEAN RICH GUY
THE GOOD REVEREND LEROY BROWN
RUPERT WHITLEY, ATTORNEY FOR MR. CHEATWOOD

DOMINIC FLAMBEAUX – THE WEDDING PLANNER
ARMANDO SANCHEZ – DOMINIC'S ASSISTANT
ROWENA LOUISE – SISTER TO DIXIE LOU
LINDY LORRAINE – DIXIE LOU'S SISTER WITH CHEMICAL IMBALANCE

DEACON BOB
TED
ELVIS PRESLEY
THE MISSING DAUGHTERS
BUFORD AND CROCKETT

ACT I SCENE 1

May be done live or as a video.

(Interior of a newscast room. The anchor is feeding the news to the television and goes live to Nancy Neon.)

SILVERTONGUE: Good evening, this is Ron Silvertongue bringing you the latest news from right here in the heart of Bayou City. Our top story tonight: Sheriff Woody admits to shooting a stranger at the Calico Café. But first, we go live to a late breaking news item from our society report, Nancy Neon. Nancy?

NANCY: *(Not aware the camera is on her.)*

Is my hair OK? What about my lip gloss? Too much, you think.

(Angrily, prima dona-ish)

Why didn't you think of that before we came on location? It's your job to make me look good.

(Startled as she realizes the camera is going. Becomes all gooshy and sweet.)

Thank you for that introduction, Ron.

Nancy Neon here on Main Street in downtown Bayou City for one of the most important events to take place here in years. We have just received word that Lazarus Cheatwood has just passed away. To those viewers who have been locked away in a Tibetan monastery for the last twenty years, Lazarus Cheatwood is the richest man in town.

While the citizens of Bayou City mourn the passing of this infamous businessman, there are issues regarding the aftermath of his death. For, his passing has grave implications, pardon the pun, for our local businesses in Bayou City.

Ron, why don't we go to the taped interview I had with Mr. Cheatwood from last month?

SILVERTONGUE: Good idea, Nancy. Let's go to the tape.

(Thinking he is off camera.)

Are we off camera? Good. Nancy, next time try a little less lip-gloss.

(Nancy throws a caustic look at the camera.)

TAPED INTERVIEW (MAY BE DONE LIVE)

(Nancy Neon is seen standing in front of a huge, dilapidated old house.)

NANCY: Nancy Neon here with an exclusive interview of Lazarus Cheatwood. Behind me you can see the charming edifice that Mr. Cheatwood has called home for the last forty years. Rumors have circulated for years regarding the going ons in this old house.

As to the impact of Lazarus Cheatwood on our economy, this strange and reclusive man has dominated the business climate in this town for twenty years. And tonight, in an exclusive one on one interview, you will get to meet Mr. Lazarus Cheatwood, up close and personal.

(In the background we see Cheatwood appear at his door and hobble down the driveway while screaming.)

CHEATWOOD: Hey, I thought you were going to get started thirty minutes ago? Time's a wasting! I got better things to do than to listen to you warble for the camera. We going to do this interview or what?

NANCY: *(Smiles at camera and it fades to interior view.)*

Now, Mr. Cheatwood, you've lived here in Bayou City for forty years. I guess you've seen a lot of people come and go.

CHEATWOOD: Yep.

NANCY: What I mean is, why don't you tell us what things were like forty years ago.

CHEATWOOD: Different.

NANCY: *(Obviously irritated at his short answers.)*

You have quite a reputation as a businessman. Is it true you own most of the businesses here in Bayou City?

CHEATWOOD: All except that stubborn Deacon Bob and that snippy Bobbie June. They won't sell out to me.

NANCY: Why do you want to own all the businesses in town?

CHEATWOOD: Because. I just do. He who dies with the most stuff wins.

NANCY: Speaking of your death, I understand you've placed a special provision in your will.

CHEATWOOD: That's right. It comes as no surprise that nobody likes me here in Redneck City. I doubt there's one person who'll shed a tear at my passing. But, I'm going to make sure they do. Every business I own is leased by their previous owners and on the event of my death, this entire city will shut down for one week to mourn my passing. That's the only way these flea picking baboons can get their businesses back.

NANCY: You will give the business back to the original owners?

CHEATWOOD: Yep. I've just about drained them all dry of money anyway. Bayou City isn't exactly a thriving metropolis. What good will it do me after I'm dead and gone? I don't have any heirs.

NANCY: And, I understand this arrangement also applies to the church?

CHEATWOOD: Well, Nancy Noodle, I don't want to take any chances. There is a remote possibility that there is something going on beyond the grave. So, to cover all my bases, I made a huge donation to Bayou City Baptist Church for their new building.

In return, the church has to let me lie in state for a whole week before my funeral and every member must come by and sign the registry or the money and the property will be taken back.

NANCY: That seems awfully mean, Mr. Cheatwood.

CHEATWOOD: You don't know the meaning of mean, Nancy Nickle. These buffoons will mourn my passing, by gosh. I'll reach out from beyond the grave and make sure everyone in Bayou City remembers Lazarus Cheatwood.

NANCY: I hardly think anyone will ever forget you, Mr. Cheatwood.

Well, on another note, I'd like to ask you about a certain rumor that has circulated for years about your wife and daughter.

CHEATWOOD: What? I'm not talking about that. This interview is over. Get out!

NANCY: But, it is rumored that your wife died in an insane asylum shortly after your daughter was born. And, that you raised your daughter right here in this house and never let her off the property.

CHEATWOOD: You want to talk about it? Huh? Well, it's no one's business how I raised my daughter. I didn't want her having anything to do with the idiots in this town. I kept her here with a private tutor.

NANCY: And, isn't it true she ran off and got married when she turned 18?

CHEATWOOD: *(Is silent for a moment.)*

Some ruthless, money grubbing man duped her into believing he loved her. Broke her heart. I had a little talk with him and found out all he was interested in was my money. I told him no one was going to take advantage of my daughter. I had the marriage annulled after one week.

NANCY: And your daughter? What happened to her?

CHEATWOOD: *(Looking suddenly vulnerable.)*

She pined away in the attic on the third floor. Her heart was broken by that foolish man just like I warned her it would be.

NANCY: Is she dead?

CHEATWOOD: Yes. Now, it's time for me to eat my prunes. So, get out of here.

NANCY: *(Back in front of the house.)*

What happened here in this creepy old house so many years ago? What happened to Lazarus Cheatwood's wife that drove her to insanity? And what ever happened to the daughter? Did she die alone up there in the attic after her husband left her? Or, is she still up there, trapped in the attic, held captive by a ruthless, cruel father? One day we may know the truth. This is Nancy Neon reporting from the house of cruelty that Lazarus Cheatwood built. Good night.

(Interview is over and we go back to Nancy on location.)

NANCY: Ron, I have with me now Mr. Cheatwood's attorney, Rupert Whitley.

WHITLEY: Good evening.

NANCY: Mr. Whitley, what happens now that Mr. Cheatwood has passed away?

WHITLEY: His will is very clear. I will be going around to each and every business in town instructing them to close their doors for one week. I have already spoken to Reverend Brown about the church and made arrangements for Mr. Cheatwood's body to lie in state for the next week.

NANCY: Well, what about any local activities planned for the next week?

WHITLEY: They will have to be postponed. Bayou City will shut down for one week. Everyone will mourn Mr. Lazarus Cheatwood's death. Everyone.

NANCY: I understand there was to have been a wedding this week in the church. What will happen with that?

WHITLEY: They'll have to make other arrangements. The wedding, along with all activities will cease or the owners of the businesses will never get their property back.

NANCY: Well, there you have it, Ron. While Mr. Lazarus Cheatwood may not live up to his name and come back from the dead, he will insure that his presence will be felt even after his passing. Nancy Neon here signing out, saying Good evening and good fun!

ACT 1

SCENE 2

(Interior Aunt Bobbie June's Tea Room. Madeline runs out on stage followed by Dossie Marie. She is obviously upset.)

MADELINE: I can't believe this! I finally find the man of my dreams and now we can't even get married in my own church.

DOSSIE MARIE: Madeline, it is not the end of the world. As my dear departed Rudy once said, "The best laid plans of lice and men often go to the dogs."

MADELINE: If you quote Rudy one more time, I'm going to scream.

DOSSIE MARIE: You're already screaming.

BOBBIE JUNE: Girls, girls! What is wrong?

MADELINE: Old Man Cheatwood died, that's what's wrong.

BOBBIE JUNE: I thought he was already dead.

DOSSIE MARIE: We only wish. He was the meanest man I ever met. He tried to run Bayou City like it was his.

BOBBIE JUNE: Yeah, he tried to force me into selling him my Tea Room, once. But I refused. I'd rather close this place down than sell it to the likes of Lazarus Cheatwood. How did he die?

DOSSIE MARIE: He 'nastied' away. Really, he was down at the bank making a deposit and just turned white as a sheet and dropped dead. Just like that! His old ticker just stopped beating.

MADELINE: That's impossible. He didn't have a heart. How could anyone who did what he did to his wife have a heart?

BOBBIE JUNE: They say she never got over her depression after having a baby. I know about it because I fought it for a long time.

MADELINE: You got depressed after having Chrissy?

BOBBIE JUNE: *(Reacting strangely as if she can't quite remember.)* Yes, there are places in my memory where I can't even remember Chrissy as a baby. You know, they call it that post partum depression.

MADELINE: I think Old Man Cheatwood had more like post party depression. I think he got tired of his wife and had her put in that asylum so he could party.

DOSSIE: Or maybe she tried to take their daughter and leave and he had her put away for good, if you know what I mean.

MADELINE: Put away?

DOSSIE MARIE: Yeah, with Jimmy Hoffa! As Rudy would have said, "Six Feet Under Davy Jones' Locker". Pushing up daisies where the fish sleep.

BOBBIE JUNE: Dossie Marie, he may have been mean, but I don't think Old Man Cheatwood would commit murder.

MADELINE: I wonder what ever happened to his daughter? They say he kept her locked up in the attic of his old mansion. Oh, I'm being silly. The real problem is what Old Man Cheatwood said in his will.

DOSSIE MARIE: Did he leave the town some money?

MADELINE: You bet. He is giving all the property and businesses back to their original owners on one condition.

BOBBIE JUNE: What?

MADELINE: That the entire town goes into mourning for a week. That means no parties, no get togethers, no celebrating.

BOBBIE JUNE: No weddings?

(Enter Whitley.)

WHITLEY: That is exactly what it means. I am Rupert Whitley, attorney at law representing the estate of Lazarus Cheatwood.

DOSSIE: Well, if you've come to celebrate the old toot dying, you can have one of Aunt Bobbie June's extra high fat deluxe delight donuts with the cashews and the chocolate sprinkles on top.

WHITLEY: Why would I be celebrating the death of my client?

MADELINE: Because he was Lazarus Cheatwood. The meanest man to ever live!

WHITLEY: Madeline Thompson, correct?

MADELINE: Yes.

WHITLEY: Soon to be Madeline Brown, the wife of the pastor of Bayou City Baptist Church?

MADELINE: Yes, yes.

WHITLEY: I hope you haven't made too many plans for your wedding. As per Mr. Cheatwood's will, the church will cease all activities for the next week.

MADELINE: Well I heard a nasty rumor to that effect and it's going to stay a rumor. Because, I'm getting married in that church day after tomorrow and that dried up old prune isn't going to keep me from it.

WHITLEY: Miss Thompson, let me remind you that Mr. Cheatwood gave over 150,000 dollars to the building fund for that new auditorium in which you will get married. If he chooses to lie in state in that auditorium, there is nothing you can do about it.

BOBBIE JUNE: Calm down, Madeline. Let me handle this.

(To Whitley)

Surely we can move Mr. Cheatwood's body out of the auditorium for a couple of hours so that Madeline can get married. After all, she is marrying the pastor of the church.

WHITLEY: The will is very explicit, Bobbie June. I just left the pastor's study and informed him of the cessation of church related activities for one week. Mr. Cheatwood's body is even now being placed at the front of the auditorium.

Also, Bobbie June, although you did not see it as a wise move to sell your property to Mr. Cheatwood, I am making a special request. Would you please close down your business for a week in respect for Mr. Cheatwood?

BOBBIE JUNE: I will not close my shop and you cannot make me. Now, get out of my establishment before I call Sheriff Woody and have you thrown out.

WHITLEY: Very well, but remember I shall be watching all of you for any violation of Mr. Cheatwood's will. You'll discover that Sheriff Woody will be on my side, not yours.

(He exits).

DOSSIE: And don't let the door hit you on the way out.

BOBBIE JUNE: This is ridiculous!

MADELINE: What am I going to do?

DOSSIE MARIE: Well, you'll just have to postpone the wedding a few days. As my dear departed Rudy once said, "Better late than . . ."

(Madeline gives her an angry look.)

. . . "quiet." I'll shut up now.

BOBBIE JUNE: I know! You can get married right here! Cheatwood doesn't own Bobbie June's Tea Room. I do.

DOSSIE MARIE: Bobbie June, you are a genius.

BOBBIE JUNE: We'll just do a little redecorating and rearranging. We can fix things up. Why, everybody in town will come to your wedding.

MADELINE: They won't have much choice. There won't be anything else going on.

DOSSIE MARIE: Well, since we are going to have a wedding after all, Madeline, just as I promised, here is my old wedding dress so you can save you some money.

(She hands Madeline a box. Madeline opens the box and takes out a HUGE wedding dress.)

MADELINE: *(Looks at the dress as she removes it from a box. It is huge.)*

Wait a minute? You sure this wasn't the tent you had your reception in?

DOSSIE: Madeline, I was a bit larger when my dear Rudy and I got married. That was long before Sue Carol's Body Wrap.

MADELINE: I oughta lay one upside your head, Dossie Marie. You promised me you had a dress that would fit me. This dress looks like it was made by Omar the tent maker.

BOBBIE JUNE: Madeline, I'm sure we can get it altered.

MADELINE: Altered? We could make two more dresses from it.

DOSSIE: Just as well. You ought to see if you can find another one. After all, you really shouldn't be getting married in a white dress with your history and all.

MADELINE: My history? You've got a lot of room to talk, Dossie Marie. You ran your daughter off and then pretended she was dead!

DOSSIE: And you didn't even have the good gumption to keep your daughter when she was born and thrust her into the hands of a cold, harsh, stranger.

BOBBIE JUNE: Alright, girls. Let's stop it right now. Chrissy might hear us.

MADELINE: She's outside waiting for the mailman to bring her some kind of package. She can't hear us. Besides, her name ain't Chrissy. She is not your daughter, she is mine.

DOSSIE: Your both wrong, you know she is my dear, beloved daughter Lydia.

(Young Woman walks in.)

MARY: Is there a problem? I heard the three of you shouting all the way outside.

BOBBIE JUNE: I'm so sorry, uh, Mary.

MADELINE: Did you get your package?

MARY: Don't try and change the subject.

BOBBIE JUNE: We were just discussing whose daughter you might be.

MARY: For now, I'm just plain Mary, just like we agreed on. I thought the three of you were doing better.

DOSSIE MARIE: Oh, honey, we are. We are getting along famously.

BOBBIE JUNE: We are trying real hard, Mary.

MADELINE: I'm just upset about Old Man Cheatwood. *(Pause.)* Dossie Marie doesn't have an excuse.

MARY: Madeline, you need to calm down. You're just nervous about the wedding.

MADELINE: I know it. First, Old Man Cheatwood dies and the town comes to a screeching halt and, Dossie Marie, that old heffer promised me I could wear her wedding dress only to discover it's big enough for the whole wedding party.

MARY: It's going to be fine, Madeline. Now, all three of you just calm down and we can figure out how to solve this problem.

DOSSIE MARIE: You're right, honey. As Rudy once said, "There is no 'I' in team." We can work together like a well-oiled team and get this wedding done. And I'll start off on the right foot by apologizing. Madeline, I'm sorry I gave you such a hard time a while ago.

MADELINE: And, I'm sorry I called you a heffer. *(Under her breath.)* Even though you do deserve it.

DOSSIE: That's perfectly understandable, Madeline. I have to take everything you say with a grain of salt considering your circumstances. As my dearly departed Rudy used to say, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but worms will never hurt me."

MADELINE: I've done told you the good reverend has forgiven me of my past.

DOSSIE: Well, he may have forgiven, but I doubt he will ever forget.

MARY: But, Dossie Marie, you forgot all about your daughter when she ran away from home. And, now, you've forgiven her for running away. It seems you can forgive and forget.

DOSSIE: My sweet child, I must agree with you. If you are my daughter, and I know you are, I have forgiven you and forgotten all about the past.

BOBBIE JUNE: Reverend Brown loves Madeline and love is stronger than anything she could have done in her past.

MADELINE: I'll say! And, he is a good kisser, too.

(They giggle as Reverend Brown and Deacon Bob walk in.)

MADELINE: Leroy? What are you doing here? You're not supposed to see me in my wedding dress.

LEROY: You're not in your dress, pumpkin cakes. I just couldn't go another minute without seeing your face.

DEACON BOB: *(Crosses over to stand by Dossie Marie.)*

Pumpkin cakes?

(Leroy crosses to Madeline and takes her hand. Behind them, Dossie Marie rolls her eyes.)

DOSSIE: I need some Pepto Bismol.

BOBBIE JUNE: Dossie, stop that. I think it's sweet.

DOSSIE: Well, I wish he would drool all over her somewhere else.

DEACON BOB: Such a rash and imperturbable expression of physical affection should be kept in private quarters.

DOSSIE: What did you say?

DEACON BOB: They should be left alone. In the basement. Behind the hula hoops.

LEROY: Madeline, I can't wait until we exchange our vows day after tomorrow. I know God has answered my prayers and you are the light of my life. I just can't live another day apart from you. That's why I just had to see you . . .

MADELINE: Oh, Leroy. You know just what to say.

LEROY: And, I've got some bad news.

MADELINE: I've already heard. Lazarus Cheatwood is lying in state in the church and we can't get married there. Why didn't you stop that attorney from letting them bring his body in?

LEROY: My sweet twinkie pie, he had all the legal papers. We don't have a choice. We push Old Man Cheatwood's body out in the cold and the church gets turned into a Whataburger.

BOBBIE JUNE: Well, we've already come up with a solution. The two of you are getting married right here.

LEROY: I'd settle for the middle of the street as long as I can marry my sweet Madeline.

(They smooch.)

DOSSIE: I've got some insulin over here if your sugar level gets too high.

DEACON BOB: Dossie Marie, I do believe your bellicose state belies an ulterior motive! You wouldn't be jealous, now would you?

DOSSIE: Jealous? Of Reverend Leroy Brown? I'm not jealous. Rudy's been dead five years and I sure don't want another man to drag around.

MADELINE: I don't want to get married in the middle of the street, Leroy. We'll just have to get married right here in Aunt Bobbie June's Tea Room.

BOBBIE JUNE: I know it's not a wedding parlor or the auditorium of the church, but we can make it work.

DOSSIE MARIE: After all, you've spent many happy hours here.

MADELINE: I must admit there are many good memories in this place. Why, this is where we all met Mary.

MARY: Only you didn't know that was my name.

BOBBIE JUNE: We still don't know that is your name. But, we have had a wonderful time the past six months taking care of you.

MARY: I'm glad all three of you have had the chance to be my mother.

MADELINE: Maybe one day that old crazy biddy, Hattie Mae will tell us whom you belong to.

DEACON BOB: Perhaps she shouldn't. I have noticed a considerable improvement in the relationships between the four of you since that ill-fated day when Buford forever sullied my shop by stepping on a skunk. In fact, I would draw the inevitable conclusion that our dear amnesiac child, Mary, has brought out the best in all of you. Revealing her to be your daughter could sour your new relationships.

LEROY: Well, I hate to rain on this little parade but I've got some more bad news.

MADELINE: What?

LEROY: My cousin Sonny Boy who was going to come and marry us? He called today and said he has the mumps.

MADELINE: The mumps?

BOBBIE JUNE: How old is your cousin?

LEROY: 42.

MADELINE: I thought mumps were only for kids.

LEROY: But you can get the mumps when you're older, Madeline darling poochkins.

MADELINE: Don't try and sweet-talk your way out of this! What are we going to do? Who is going to marry us?

DOSSIE MARIE: I think God may be sending you a sign, Madeline. First, Old Man Cheatwood dies and is laid out in his coffin in the church and now, Sonny Boy, is it? Sonny Boy gets the mumps. Maybe you should consider postponing the wedding.

MADELINE: Oh, no we're not! We've got an all expense paid honeymoon trip to Branson, Missouri. We can't cancel the wedding.

DEACON BOB: Perhaps I can shed a little warming sunshine on this cloudy day. I can take care of this little problem. You see, I am an ordained minister fully licensed in this state to unite anyone in holy matrimony.

MADELINE: I'd rather get married by that skunk than let you marry us.

LEROY: Now, Madeline, my little sugar cookie, don't get so upset. If Deacon Bob is licensed, we can get married.

MADELINE: But, how do we know he's really licensed? He may have gotten his license in that Tibetan monastery where he found the baseball signed by Babe Ruth.

DEACON BOB: My dear Madeline, I am not a Buddhist monk. I do not meditate, rub my belly button, or chant. I am a Christian. And, I am licensed to marry you. And, as fortune would have it, just this week I have lowered my prices. I have a new special for newlyweds. If you take advantage of my special offer, I'll throw in a set of Forbidden City Satin kimonos for your honeymoon suite. The total package including the nuptials is a mere \$124.95.

MADELINE: That's outrageous!

DEACON BOB: But, seeing as how we are all good friends and have suffered through calamity and rueful times together and seeing as how my establishment and Bobbie June's Tea Room are the only remaining businesses not owned by the late and recalcitrant Lazarus Cheatwood, I will overlook any need for remuneration and perform the ceremony for free. As a wedding gift from one man of the cloth to the other. Now, would you like for me to do the duties or will you postpone your wedding?

BOBBIE JUNE: Madeline, it's not who marries you that matters. It's who you marry.

DOSSIE MARIE: That's right, as my dear departed Rudy once said, "I do".

MADELINE: Dossie Marie, if you quote your dear departed Rudy one more time, as I once said, I'm going to lay one upside your head. The man is dead! Let him rest in peace.

BOBBIE JUNE: Dossie Marie, maybe it's time to move on.

MARY: Now that you've turned a new leaf over, why not get a fresh new start.

DOSSIE MARIE: What do you mean?

DEACON BOB: I understand what they are trying to tell you, my dear sweet Dossie Marie. Can you not admit that you have at times since the death of your dear husband felt a resurgence, a rekindling of the passions and flames of love? Do you not feel a burning desire within to enter once again into the passion of a loving relationship?

DOSSIE MARIE: Yeah I have. But, I took a Rolaid and it went away.

DEACON BOB: Your dear departed Rudy once told me, "Deacon Bob, if I ever kick the bucket, make sure Dossie Marie is well taken care of."

DOSSIE MARIE: (*Looks at him with an astonished expression.*) No one quotes Rudy but me and if you think I'm looking for love in your general direction, you can go hide behind the hula hoops.

MADELINE: Well, if you will excuse me for a moment, I want to powder my nose and try and decide if I really want to be married by Deacon Bob.

ACT 1

SCENE 3

(Buford and Crockett enter. Buford has a large, paper wrapped package under his arm.)

BOBBIE JUNE: I suppose you boys are looking for a place to play dominos.

CROCKETT: Naw. It's been six months since Buford stepped on the skunk and Deacon Bob's Shop finally smells normal again. Which means it still smells like old Buford, here.

BUFORD: Crockett I don't stink all that bad. I've been washing with that new roman therapy soap and I smell pretty good.

CROCKETT: Roman therapy? Don't you mean aromatherapy?

BUFORD: I got an aroma all right.

BOBBIE JUNE: Why did you bring your aroma over to my place?

BUFORD: No matter how fast I walked I couldn't leave it behind.

CROCKETT: We was trying to help somebody, Bobbie June. Don't listen to Buford.

BUFORD: Wait a minute, Crockett. Let me tell them about those two weirdoes.

DEACON BOB: You have somebody you would designate a weirdo? I'm not so sure I am prepared to make the acquaintance of someone Buford might consider a weirdo.

BUFORD: I think they were super heroes.

DEACON BOB: Super heroes?

CROCKETT: Buford, why would you say that?

BUFORD: One of them said he was Armor Man and the other Flambo.

DEACON BOB: Buford, I believe it is time for you to seek another form of therapy other than aroma. Perhaps psychological?

CROCKETT: Wait a minute, Deacon Bob. Buford ain't crazy. These fellers said their names and they sounded like that.

BUFORD: Crockett and I were over to Deacon Bob's playing dominoes and these two fellers came in looking for Madeline.

CROCKETT: Yep, said they was here to help plan the hitching up.

BOBBIE JUNE: Hitching up? You mean like your sagging pants?

BUFORD: No, ma'am. Crockett's talking about getting hitched as in getting married. They was awfully strange fellers all right.

CROCKETT: Yep, and they is coming this way.

BUFORD: And, the mailman handed me this here package for Mary.

(Mary takes the package and moves off to stage right. She is interrupted in her examination of the package by Armando later on in this scene.)

(Dominic and Armando enter with a definitive flair.)

DOMINIC: Never fear, Dominic Flambeaux the wedding planner is here.

(Snaps fingers or claps.)

Armando, Armando.

ARMANDO: Yes, boss, I am here.

(Reacts with surprise.)

Oh my! I thought Deacon Boob's place was a sight. What is this place?

DOMINIC: The Twilight Zone meets Green Acres.

ARMANDO: Oh, the drapes, the drapes Dominic! Look at the drapes. I am feeling weak. I fear I may swoon.

DOMINIC: *(Pulls out an ammonia vial and waves it under Armando's nose while holding him up.)*

Be brave, my worthy assistant. *(Looks around at the people.)*

The trauma is too much for him. He has the soul of an artiste.

Armando, fear not. I shall transform this hideous backwater storefront into a parlor of love.

(Abruptly drops Armando to the floor. Mary puts aside the package and hurries up to help him up.)

ARMANDO: *(Recovers and sees Mary.)*

Am I in heaven? Do I not see an angel of heavenly beauty before me?

I am Armando Sanchez at your disposal, assistant to the great Dominic Flambeaux. And, I hope you are not the blushing bride for if so, then my heart will cease to pulsate and I will drop dead of horrible disappointment. My dear, your hair is like a cascading velvet tapestry and your eyes are like tiny sequins glistening by candlelight.

MARY: *(Reacts in disgust and drops him. Again.)* Would somebody tell me what is going on?

DOMINIC: Stop drooling over the girl, Armando. There will be time for women later.

(To Aunt Bobbie June.)

Now, I understand from my conversation.

Wait. . . conversation implies literacy and these two gentlemen *(He motions to Buford and Crockett)* are far from literate.

However, I understand from their attempts at communication that the church is closed for mourning and the wedding will be somewhere else.

And I do hope this isn't the boudoir where the wedding will take place. It is simply too gauche.

BOBBIE JUNE: What? This is my tea room and it is not, What did you call it?

DOMINIC: Gauche. Rural. Cowbellish. Hooterville. Dogpatch. Should I go on?

DOSSIE: Hey, wait a minute there Mr. Flambo, don't be making fun of my friend's shop.

DOMINIC: OK. I'll make fun of your clothes. Where did you buy them, Goodwill?

MARY: Uh, Mr. Flambeaux, maybe you should stop critiquing the room and its occupants and get on with the wedding planning. And while you're at it call off your Latin Lover. I am not the bride. *(She pulls away from Armando and returns to stage left where over the remainder of the scene, she opens the package and examines the contents of the box. Inside is a large family Bible and she opens it and reads it towards the end of the scene.)*

DOMINIC: Of course, you are not. I am here to help my dear Madeline.

MADELINE: *(Sees Dominic as she returns from the powder room.)*

Dominic! I am so glad you came.

(She runs up and they do the kissy kissy. The girls react in amazement.)

DOMINIC: Madeline, I wouldn't miss your wedding for anything. And, from the looks of this place, I got here just in time.

BOBBIE JUNE: Madeline, why don't you introduce us.

MADELINE: Oh, I'm so sorry. This is Dominic Flambeaux. From New Orleans. One of the South's best wedding planners.

DOMINIC: South? My dear, I am the best in the nation! Isn't that right Armando?

ARMANDO: He is the best, the very best. There is no other in the world who approaches his ability. His expertise is of universal renown. He once planned the wedding for Britney Spears. And, Dolly Partin.

DOMINIC: Enough Armando. My worthy assistant, Armando Sanchez. I keep him around for the drapes.

MADELINE: Dominic and I met when I was in California that time. You know, when my hormones were acting up?

DOSSIE: When you had your baby!

MADELINE: Yes, bigmouth. Don't remind me of that.

LEROY: It's OK, Madeline. It doesn't bother me.

MADELINE: Oh, you're so sweet Leroy.

DOMINIC: Leroy? This is Reverend Leroy Brown?

(Begins to sing and dance.)

Bad, bad Leroy Brown. Baddest man in the whole . . .

I'm sorry, I see the strangest humor in just about any situation. And, trust me, this situation has a lot of potential.

MADELINE: Dominic and I became the best of friends and he promised if I ever got married he would do my wedding.

DOMINIC: And, here I am in, . . . what was the name of this hamlet, Armando?

ARMANDO: Bobo City.

BOBBIE JUNE: Bayou City.

DOMINIC: Oh, yes. Bayou City. I should have worn my crawfish earrings. Now, Madeline, we're simply going to have to strip this entire room. Maybe strip isn't strong enough. How about sand blast it?

MADELINE: Dominic, we can't do that. This is Aunt Bobbie June's Tea Room. And since I can't get married in the church, I want to get married here just like it is.

DOMINIC: Well, my dear, there is no accounting for taste. And, I'm not talking about yours. I suppose we could spruce it up a bit!

ARMANDO: I'm seeing some tall flamingos right here backed up by crushed velvet drapes with a soft magenta patina.

DOMINIC: Or, how about some naked cherub statues right here.

ARMANDO: Frolicking in a fountain!

DOMINIC: Yes, with a rotating disco ball right up there.

ARMANDO: And, my dear lady, *(to Mary)* tell me you are to be the made of honor and I will prepare for you the most beautiful sash to accompany your dress.

DOMINIC: Armando, Armando, pay attention. No sashes. Only drapes.

Now, we'll finish it all off with lots of feathers and boas and a demolition crew out front waiting to tear it all down when we're done so no one will know I've been here.

MADELINE: Oh, Dominic, you're so cute. Thank you so much for being so understanding.

DOMINIC: A promise is a promise, my dear sweet Madeline. Well, if you girls don't mind, it's time to measure. Come, Armando.

(Pulls out measuring tape and begins to go around the room.)

DOSSIE: Where on earth did you come up with him?

MADELINE: We were good friends in California. He ran out there to get away from a painful past, you know get a new start. Sort of like what I did.

DOSSIE: When is he going to have his baby?

BOBBIE JUNE: Dossie Marie, cut that out! Any friend of Madeline's is a friend of ours.

DOMINIC: Where did you get this wallpaper? From a San Francisco bordello?

(Flits away.)

BOBBIE JUNE: *(Gritting her teeth.)* I'm going to kill him.

(Enter Dixie, and her two sisters.)

DIXIE LOU: Madeline, Madeline, look who just got into town.

MADELINE: Well, if it isn't the Andrew sisters at a sock hop.

DIXIE LOU: No, silly. These are my sisters, not Andrew's. Rowena Louise and Lindy Lorraine. My mother just loved the letter "L".

ROWENA: Pleased to meet you, Myrtle.

MADELINE: My name is Madeline.

LINDY: Ah, don't mind Rowena. She has short-term memory loss. She has a chemistry set imbalance. *(Pointing to her head.)* I'm Lindy Lorraine.

ROWENA: And, I'm Rowena Louise, Maggie.

MADELINE: Whatever. So, Dixie Lou, why are you here?

DIXIE LOU: Well, we have the most wonderful surprise for you, Madeline.

DOSSIE: Tell me it isn't that bust of Elvis again?

DIXIE LOU: Oh, no. I don't want to talk about that.

BOBBIE JUNE: Why not, Dixie Lou?

DIXIE LOU: You remember the clay from Graceland the bust was supposed to be made of?

MADELINE: Don't tell me. It was chewing gum.

LINDY: No. It was play dough. It all cracked off and fell onto the floor. Poor Dixie Lou thought Elvis was molting. Rowena thought he was coming back to life.

ROWENA: Dixie Lou said it was his embalmed head.

LINDY: No, it wasn't an "embonation". Dixie Lou said her friends called it an abomination. Like the abominable snowman.

DIXIE LOU: Elvis was a showman, not a snowman.

ROWENA: (*Begins to sing Frosty the snowman.*)

LINDY: Rowena Louise, stop singing that song. Now, back to the play dough. Poor Dixie Lou cried for days.

ROWENA: Who was crying? Dixie Lou, why were you crying?

DIXIE LOU: Because of the bust.

ROWENA: I'm not going to bust out of this dress! I can't help it if my dress is too tight. It was momma's. You know, I remember Momma so well. She was so sweet and used to make meat pies. (*Notices Madeline again.*) Hi, I'm Rowena Louise. You must be Meatpie.

DOMINIC: (*Flits in.*) It is true. I've stepped off the face of the earth into the Twilight Zone. Tonight's episode, reunion on Hee Haw.

DOSSIE: That is enough, Mr. Fondue. Cut to the chase, Dixie Lou. What is your surprise?

DIXIE LOU: Well, first we went over to the church. And when we got inside it was all dark and gloomy. At first, we thought it was empty.

LINDY: But, there was someone already there. Poor Dixie Lou walked down the aisle . . .

ROWENA: I walked the aisle when I was eight years old. I was baptized with a dog tick.

LINDY: Rowena, we aren't talking about your baptism.

ROWENA: I pulled that dog tick off and stomped it on the floor. Blood splattered everywhere.

DIXIE LOU: Rowena, enough about the dog tick.

ROWENA: Since it was baptized with me, reckon it went to heaven?

DIXIE LOU: (*Ignoring Rowena.*) Anyway, at the end of the aisle next to the Lord Supper Table, there was a casket. And, it was open. And inside was this body.

MADELINE: Let me guess, you thought it was Elvis.

LINDY: Madeline, Elvis is not dead, remember? (*Makes funny eyes at Madeline as if to say, humor the poor girl.*)

DIXIE LOU: That's right. He was abducted by that space ship that Hattie Mae had a piece of. I wish I had bought that alien spaceship artifact instead of that play dough head of Elvis.

ROWENA: I was abducted once.

LINDY: Anyway, Rowena went over to the casket and tried to talk to the body and we discovered he was dead.

DOSSIE: Or course he was dead. Why would a live person be inside the casket?

ROWENA: Dracula sleeps in a casket.

LINDY: Honey, Dracula is not technically alive. He is one of the living dead.

DIXIE LOU: Sort of like Elvis. They say he's dead, but he's really alive. You know, one of the living dead.

DOMINIC: (*To the audience.*) Elvis is a vampire? (*Like an Elvis impression of Bela Logusi.*) I want to drink your blood, baby. Uh Huh!

LINDY: Of course Rowena must have talked to him for a good thirty minutes before she realized he wasn't answering.

DIXIE LOU: We realized that Rowena had gotten a funeral mixed up with your wedding. She does that sometimes.

ROWENA: I always wear the same pair of shoes, though.

LINDY: And if there was a funeral in the church, there couldn't possibly be a wedding, too. So, we decided that if you weren't there, you would be here.

DIXIE LOU: Because you always here. You're never there.

ROWENA: Are we here yet?

DIXIE LOU: Anyway, our surprise is, my sisters and I are going to sing at your wedding.

MADELINE: What?

BOBBIE JUNE: Sing at the wedding?

DOSSIE: Maybe you ought to sing at the funeral first.

DIXIE LOU: We can't sing this song at a funeral.

LINDY: We've practiced it for weeks. It is not a funeral song.

MADELINE: I'll bet it would raise the dead.

DIXIE LOU: Madeline, we have searched and searched through all the songs of the world and found the perfect song for your wedding.

ROWENA: *(Starts singing Frosty again.)*

LINDY: Rowena, Rowena, we're singing the other song.

DIXIE LOU: Girls?

(They all begin to sing "Love Me Tender" except for Rowena who keeps wandering off into Frosty the Snowman. Dominic joins in for the last verse. They all stop and look at him.)

DOMINIC: What? Barbra Streisand couldn't make it so the agency sent me.

Madeline, I take it all back about this place. Your wedding deserves to be here.

(They all start talking and bickering and Bobbie June goes over to table beside Mary. She notices the package.)

BOBBIE JUNE: I can't stand much more of this, Mary. What did you get in the mail?

MARY: *(Mary closes the box and rewraps the package. She acts very nervous.)* Nothing, Bobbie June. Just something I ordered on the Internet. I think I need to run home with this. *(She exits and pauses stage left, glancing back at the others frozen in place. She dials cel phone.)* It came in the mail. Yes, I think this is the real thing. I can come right now, but it means I might be late for the wedding. *(Hangs up phone. Looks at the package and back at the cast frozen on the stage.)* Oh, they're going to kill me. But, it looks like it's time for me to go.

(Exits.)

ACT2

SCENE 1

HATTIE: *(Enters ABJTR and looks around.)*

Well, merciful heavens if this place don't look like a shrine to Elton John. What in tarnation has happened here?

BOBBIE JUNE: *(Comes in from back room with coat on.)*

Hattie Mae, we're not open for business today.

HATTIE: Neither is anybody else in town. That Old Man Cheatwood has brought this town to a screeching halt. No, I heard Madeline was getting married here. Tomorrow.

BOBBIE JUNE: She is. Are you planning on coming to the wedding?

HATTIE: I didn't receive an invitation.

BOBBIE JUNE: You don't have an address. I'm sure Madeline wouldn't mind you coming. Assuming you have something to wear.

HATTIE: I wouldn't come in my pajamas, that's for sure.

BOBBIE JUNE: That's a relief.

HATTIE: So, what happened to this place?

Looks like someone went down to the flea market and brought back all the frufu stuff nobody would buy. And, I thought my house was full of junk.

BOBBIE JUNE: Your house?

HATTIE: Just joshing, Bobbie June. You know I'm Bayou City's homeless bag lady with no place to lay my head. My house is wherever I am at night. And usually I'm surrounded by garbage and junk so right now I feel at home.

BOBBIE JUNE: Hattie Mae, this feller from New Orleans came in and redecorated the place for Madeline's wedding.

HATTIE: Well, you know what. It suits her taste just fine. Outlandish.

MADELINE: *(Entering with hair up in curlers.)*

I heard that last remark, Hattie Mae. Dominic is a friend of mine and whatever he wants to do with the tea room is fine with me. He has an artistic flair.

HATTIE: A flare would be good to take to this place. Once it goes up in flames, it might be presentable.

MADELINE: Hattie Mae, I ought to . . .

BOBBIE JUNE: Calm down, Madeline. Don't get all riled up just before your wedding day.

MADELINE: I guess you're right. Did I understand that you want to come to my wedding?

HATTIE: There won't be anywhere else in town to go tomorrow.

MADELINE: I hope you weren't planning on wearing that.

HATTIE: This is my casual wear. I plan on donning a formal gown. I never appear at such public affairs in my day-to-day clothing.

In fact, I found this evening gown at Teresa's Hand Me Down Heaven. It was once worn by Cher at a concert she gave over in Shreveport. It is covered with hand picked zirconium diamonds and made from Oriental silk.

Bobbie June, I do believe it would fit you perfectly. Do you already have a dress for the wedding? If not, I can sell you this dress for a mere \$182.12.

MADELINE: Hattie Mae, what was that old song Cher once sang? Let's see, "Gypsies, Tramps, and Thieves?" Sounds like she wrote that song about you.

HATTIE: Are you calling me a thief?

MADELINE: You would be if you took that kind of money from Bobbie June for this dress that Cher was supposed to have worn. Probably something left over from Halloween.

HATTIE: There is no need to be mean, Madeline. I would almost believe you have taken after the ways of Lazarus Cheatwood.

BOBBIE JUNE: Hattie, Madeline is just having a bad day. She really hoped to get married in the church instead of here. And, we haven't been able to find Mary. Yesterday, she received some kind of package and just disappeared.

MADELINE: She is my maid of honor and it's not like her to just up and disappear. She's been hovering over me like a mother hen the past two weeks.

HATTIE: Maybe she needed a break, Madeline. Perhaps that package was a very special gift for you on the occasion of your wedding. Or, may you just got on her last nerve.

MADELINE: You have a lot of room to talk. The last time you were in here, you tried to pawn off a garden spade saying it was from an alien spacecraft.

HATTIE: The one that kidnapped Elvis! Yep, I found it down at Cooter's Creek, and . . .

BOBBIE JUNE: We remember, Hattie Mae. Have you sold it to anyone, yet?

HATTIE: No. I'm giving it to Madeline as a wedding gift.

MADELINE: Why don't you tell me Mary is my daughter? That would be the best wedding gift I could receive.

HATTIE: Judging by your attitude, you have not improved enough for me to reveal to you whose daughter Mary is.

(Enter Deacon Bob and the domino boys.)

DEACON BOB: Good morning, Bobbie June.

BOBBIE JUNE: Good morning . . . wait, you three aren't going to play dominos in here today! I've got a wedding to get ready for.

DEACON BOB: Of course not. Buford and Crockett are going to help me with my part of the ceremony. I have this special crystal pulpit I acquired from the Crystal Cathedral.

HATTIE: Your part of the ceremony?

MADELINE: Deacon Bob is going to marry us.

HATTIE: He is? Did he offer you his special?

MADELINE: Yes.

HATTIE: I can beat his price on the kimonos.

DEACON BOB: Now, Hattie Mae, please stay out of this. I am giving the kimonos to Leroy and Madeline as a wedding gift. And, I am waiving my fees.

HATTIE: You getting soft in the heart, Deacon Bob?

DEACON BOB: There is no need to resort to baseless insults, Hattie Mae. Buford, you and Crockett go get my pulpit and put it over there?

BUFORD: Then can we play dominos?

BOBBIE JUNE: I said no dominos! Get out of here and bring in that pulpit. Madeline, let us discuss the details of your wedding. It has been quite a spell since I united anyone in holy matrimony.

MADELINE: *(Pauses to think and suddenly becomes quite emotional and upset as if it finally sinks in how bad the situation has become.)*

Oh my gosh! Bobbie June do you realize that I am about to get married by Deacon Bob? I can't take much more of this!

HATTIE: Well, Madeline, if anyone could mess up your wedding, it would be Old Man Cheatwood. It doesn't surprise me that Lazarus Cheatwood would make sure that even from beyond the grave he can make everybody's life a mess. The world is a far better place without him and once his cold body is in the grave we can all breath a sigh of relief.

BOBBIE JUNE: Sounds like you knew Mr. Cheatwood personally.

HATTIE: I just can't abide what he is putting Madeline through.

MADELINE: Since when have you cared enough about me to get mad at the likes of Lazarus Cheatwood?

HATTIE: *(She is suddenly very serious.)*

Madeline, let me be totally honest. I have always had a special affection for you and Bobbie June and Dossie Marie. I may, at times, act a bit crazy, but the three of you are good-hearted women. You don't deserve this foul turn of events.

If I could change anything, I would. I tried to see if there was anything I could do to stop that Rupert Whitley from invoking the terms of the will, but I am, after all just a homeless bag lady. If I was more than that then maybe things would be different. Very different.

I am truly sorry you can't have your wedding in the church. If there is anything else I can do, please let me know.

(She exits.)

BOBBIE JUNE: That was strange. Sounds like she has had some run ins with Old Man Cheatwood.

MADELINE: Yeah, and they didn't sound too good.

DOMINIC: *(Entering from the back room with Dossie Marie close behind.)* And then I said, 'You want me to do what with the elephant?'

DOSSIE: *(Laughs hysterically.)* Why, Dominic that is the funniest thing I have ever heard.

DOMINIC: *(Sees Madeline and gasps.)* Oh, my, is that Madeline or Julia Roberts?

MADELINE: Dominic, you are so flattering.

DOSSIE: Oh, please. It is too early for this. If Leroy comes in here and starts blathering all over you, I'm going to be sick.

DOMINIC: Dossie Marie, flattery will get you everywhere. And, in this town you need as much of it as you can muster.

(Buford and Crockett show up with a fold up table and begin to set it up to play dominos.)

BUFORD: Sorry about the pulpit, Deacon Bob.

DEACON BOB: Sorry? Why are you apologizing?

CROCKETT: He didn't mean for it to happen.

DEACON BOB: For what to happen?

BUFORD: I forgot to tie it down in the back of the truck.

CROCKETT: It's probably nothing but splinters by now spread all down Main Street.

DEACON BOB: How convenient that you forgot to tie down the pulpit in the back of the truck and yet your domino table survived intact.

BUFORD: I'd never let anything happen to our domino table. I make sure it gets here in one piece. You want to play dominos?

DEACON BOB: No, I'm going to go find the residue of my pulpit. *(He exits.)*

ARMANDO: *(Comes in from the back room.)* The drapes have arrived, Dominic. I am so excited. My heart is going pitty patty.

(To Bobbie June) There's nothing as exciting as unpacking fresh drapes and steaming the wrinkles out of them. Except.

(He pauses and looks off into space.)

The sight of the beautiful face of Mary. Where is she? I haven't had the chance to behold her beauty since yesterday.

MADELINE: She's probably hiding from you. We haven't seen her since yesterday afternoon.

ARMANDO: Could she then be missing? Perhaps abducted?

DOSSIE MARIE: I hope not.

BUFORD: Maybe she was taken by that space ship Hattie Mae has a piece of.

CROCKETT: Yeah, the same aliens that abducted Rowena Louise.

ARMANDO: This is tragic. Appalling.

DOMINIC: Irritating. Would you snap out of it, Armando. I need your full attention on the drapes.

ARMANDO: Drapes? How could I possibly think about such trivial matters as drapes at a time like this? The love of my life is missing and in danger. I must go to her side and rescue her!

(He exits.)

DOMINIC: What a drama queen! He has it bad, my dear Madeline if he is going to ignore a new set of drapes. He'll turn this little town upside down to find Mary. Of course, there's no telling what he'll find underneath.

BOBBIE JUNE: Stop making fun of Bayou City. It may be small and a little strange but it's our home.

DOMINIC: Forgive me. It's just that I had forgotten what little towns can be like. Once you've taken in the sights and sounds of the Big Easy, you just can't go home.

BOBBIE JUNE: Did you grow up in a small town?

DOMINIC: *(Looking flustered.)* Heavens no! I'm from New Orleans, of course.

DOSSIE MARIE: I thought you told me you grew up in Paris?

DOMINIC: Once you have walked the rain streaked streets of Paris and taken in the smells of the tiny shops, the sound of the music and eaten the tiny little crème puffs. When you have seen the lovers walking hand in hand in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower, you realize you are a part of Paris. Forever. You will never leave.

MADELINE: Oh, how sweet. I just wish Leroy could afford to take me to Paris.

LEROY: *(Entering and mimicking Gomez from Addams family.)*

Oh, Madeline, my love, my cupcake.

(He grabs her arm and kisses her hand.)

If I could, I would take you to Paris.

MADELINE: Oh, Leroy, not in front of the company. Besides, you shouldn't see me in my curlers.

LEROY: Your beauty can never be hidden by mere curlers, my munchkins.

NANCY: *(Enters.)* Good morning, Bobbie June.

BOBBIE JUNE: Nancy Neon? What are you doing here?

NANCY: Why covering a story of epic proportions. My camera crew is right outside and I was hoping I could get an interview of the prospective bride and groom.

MADELINE: Interview? I'm in my curlers.

NANCY: Trust me. No one will notice.

MADELINE: We don't have anything to say to you, Nancy Neon.

LEROY: Madeline, honey, don't be so mean. Ms. Neon asked me earlier if we could talk to her.

MADELINE: And you said yes?

LEROY: I didn't see any harm in it.

NANCY: *(Comes over and puts her arm in Leroy's.)*

Madeline, dear, surely you see no harm in a little interview?

MADELINE: All I see is another woman making the moves on my man.

NANCY: My, my, Madeline, are we a little bit jealous? I am a professional newswoman documenting an exciting chapter in the life our small community. It's not everyday the very eligible new pastor of our church gets married. Especially to someone like you.

MADELINE: Like me?

LEROY: Miss Neon, there is no need to be condescending to my fiancée.

NANCY: Reverend Brown, you mistake my intent. Let's stop and think about the circumstances surrounding your wedding. Here you are, a man in his prime having never married. Instead, devoting himself to Godly pursuits, to preaching the Gospel, to teaching the world about the forgiveness and unconditional love of Jesus Christ.

And, out of the blue, a veritable Mary Magdalene crosses your path, catching your eye with her wily manners and sweet talk. Now, any other man would have turned his back on someone with an unsavory past. But, only a special man like you would look beyond this woman's tawdry past and find a lasting love.

That's a story, honey!

MADELINE: You little vamp! I oughta take a two by four to you!

NANCY: See what I mean? The loving forgiving parson and the wild, untamed woman. A story that could win me the Pulitzer.

MADELINE: If I had a Pulitzer, I'd run you over with it.

NANCY: Madeline, a Pulitzer is a prize for literature, not a car.

MADELINE: And you are a nasty, man hungry, gossip!

NANCY: I am a professional, Madeline. The public deserves to know what their pastor is up to.

LEROY: Miss Neon . . .

MADELINE: Let me handle this, Leroy. Nancy Neon, this has nothing to do with your Puritan Prize or your human-interest stories. It has nothing to do with showing this town how wonderful Leroy is or how, what was the word you used, tawdry I am.

I knew what you were up to the day you brought Leroy those brownies right after he came here as our pastor. You told him they were your own private recipe but I saw you

buy them down at the Super Wal Mart. You've had your sight set on him since he came to town. I know you were moved by his good looks and his sweet personality. But, I think the best woman won.

LEROY: Wait a minute. I didn't know this was a contest.

NANCY: Honey, you men never do. We like it that way. But, it isn't over until that ring is on your finger.

MADELINE: Nancy, no matter how hard you try, this contest is over.

NANCY: Well, at least this round is. Today. I still have tomorrow. Now, about that interview Pastor Brown? Why don't you and I go in the back room and do our little interview and then Madeline can join us later after she has cooled down and gotten the curlers out of her hair.

MADELINE: He's not going anywhere alone with you, sister. Why you're worse than I ever thought Mary was when she first showed up. Leroy, I forbid you from doing an interview with this Jezebel.

NANCY: If I can't do my interview, then I'll have to come up with my own story. Let's see, "Desperate lonely housewife spins a web of deceit and catches local clergyman."

MADELINE: That's it. Out of here! Now!

NANCY: Have it your way, Madeline. Leroy, if you change your mind about that interview, here's my business card with my private number. Give me a call. *(She exits.)*

MADELINE: *(Snatches card out of Leroy's hand and tears it up.)* You won't be needing that, Leroy.

LEROY: I'm still trying to recover from the fact I was the prize in a contest between you and Nancy Neon.

MADELINE: Leroy, you were never a prize. I love you because you're Leroy Brown, the man who loves me for who and what I am. I never thought of our relationship as a contest. Only a woman like Nancy would think that way.

LEROY: Well, I don't care what she says about tomorrow. You and I are getting married in spite of all the trials and tribulations we're having. All those things just mean that old Satan is trying to stop us and the Lord wants us to be together.

MADELINE: And, in the face of all that's happening, that is all that matters.

DOMINIC: Well, that was certainly interesting. Nauseating, but interesting. If you soap opera rejects can stand to live without me for a moment, I'm going to pick up the cream puffs. And on the way I'm calling my agent in Hollywood. This entire affair is perfect for an episode of Big Brother.

(He exits.)

ACT 2

SCENE 2

(A man enters and Bobbie June notices the man and looks at him strangely.)

BOBBIE JUNE: May I help you?

TED: Bobbie June? You don't remember me?

BOBBIE JUNE: Do I know you? *(Reacts violently and falls back toward the bar.)*
What are you doing here?

DOSSIE: *(Hears them and turns.)* Bobbie June? Are you all right?

TED: I know this is a shock, but I decided it was time for me to come home.

MADELINE: Who are you?

TED: Ted. Bobbie June's husband.

MADELINE: *(Glances over at Bobbie June as Dossie Marie goes over to comfort her.)*

Thank you Lord for giving me somebody to take out all this frustration on.

(Goes over to Ted.)

You no good, two faced, lousy excuse for a man! You actually think you can come home after what you did to Bobbie June?

TED: I know I have no excuses, but Chrissy insisted I come home.

(The women all look at each other.)

BOBBIE JUNE: Chrissy? Then Mary is my daughter? I knew it all along.

DOSSIE: But, she can't be. She's my daughter. I mean . . . Now look here Ted, you just hop right back into the car you drove up in and go right back to Canada. Now that we know Mary is Chrissy, Bobbie June don't need you messing things up.

MADELINE: Yeah. I was hoping Mary would be my daughter, but since she ain't then I got to think about Bobbie June. You ran out on her and kidnapped Chrissy years ago. What makes you think you can just come right back in to her life?

TED: *(Looks helplessly at Rev. Brown.)* I think there's been a misunderstanding.

MADELINE: I'll say there has been. You misunderstood you could come waltzing back into this good woman's life and she would forget what you put her through and she would take you back.

LEROY: I think we need to just calm down, here, Madeline.

MADELINE: You stay out of this, Leroy. This is woman's business.

LEROY: Peach fuzz, I just think we need to be calm and . . .

MADELINE: Pastorly, I know what you're going to say. Forgive and forget. Just like you were cozying up to Nancy Neon a little bit ago. Well, this piece of trash is beyond forgiveness.

LEROY: And, you weren't?

MADELINE: *(Pauses and glares at him.)* Are you taking his side in this? Huh?

Just like a man to take up for someone like Ted. He kidnapped Chrissy and ran off to Canada leaving Bobbie June behind to fend for herself.

LEROY: And you had a child out of wedlock. I forgave you. Why can't you forgive Ted?

MADELINE: You just don't understand.

LEROY: Jesus would understand.

MADELINE: Don't preach to me, Leroy.

LEROY: I'm not preaching. I'm just trying to be reasonable.

MADELINE: Reasonable? I'll show you reasonable. It's reasonable to think that Ted is a jerk and you are on his side. It's reasonable to think you were perfectly willing to give a *private* interview to Nancy Neon on the eve of our wedding. So, now it's reasonable to think that the wedding is off. Come on, Bobbie June. Let me make you a cup of coffee.

(The women exit leaving Leroy and Ted standing in the empty room. Dominic comes in and looks around. He is carrying a large plate of hors d'ouvres.)

DOMINIC: Now, we'll put the pastries right here. I had these shipped in from a little shop on St. Charles St. Ooooo, I just love the cream puffs.

DEACON BOB: *(Enters carrying the remnants of a busted podium.)* It is ruined. I secured this pulpit from the Crystal Cathedral itself. I hope you're satisfied, Buford.

BUFORD: *(Looks up from his domino game.)* I am. I'm winning.

DEACON BOB: *(Notices the three men standing in the room.)* I must apologize, Leroy. It would seem that Buford, unseemly oaf that he is, failed to secure this beautiful crystal podium in the back of the truck and it is now shattered and scattered down Main Street.

LEROY: We won't be needing it, Deacon Bob.

DEACON BOB: What?

DOMINIC: We have problems?

LEROY: She called off the wedding.

DOMINIC: We aren't having a good day, are we?

TED: And, it's my fault.

DOMINIC: And you are?

Let me guess. Madeline's long, lost love returned to his love nest. You've been suffering from amnesia in Bostwana where you ran a clinic for those suffering from the Ebola Virus. You fell into the Nile and woke up in Cairo and remembered Madeline. You've been hitchhiking your way across North Africa and you stowed away on a freighter bound for New York. Your burning love for Madeline carried you through the night across sea and desert, through rain and snow until you arrived here at the very end of the world. The armpit of America. Only to discover that she loves another. Reverend Leroy Brown.

(Turns to the audience.) I told you it was a soap opera.

TED: I'm not in love with Madeline. He is. I am Bobbie June's husband.

DEACON BOB: The very husband who absconded with her daughter to the great Northwest territory of Canada?

TED: I don't know anything about absconding or kidnapping. I'm afraid someone has the story all messed up.

DOMINIC: No kidnapping? No intrigue? Drat! It sounded so good, too. Oh, well since there will be no wedding we shouldn't let these pastries go to waste. Gentlemen, let's drown our sorrows in fatty carbohydrates and caffeine. Oh, I would just die for an espresso.

(They sit at the table.)

LEROY: You talk about being Bobbie June's husband as if you never divorced.

TED: We didn't. We've been separated all these years.

LEROY: Why did you run off?

TED: I didn't. I left because Bobbie June asked me to.

DEACON BOB: What? That's not the version we have heard.

TED: Maybe I should just shut up and leave. It is our business after all.

DEACON BOB: One moment sir. By showing up at this most inopportune moment you have laid waste to the plans of this good man to marry the woman of his dreams. Also, this wedding planner entrepreneur was brought into our very midst, bringing with him the Sodom and Gomorrah trappings of New Orleans to our fair city for the purpose of converting this august establishment into a wedding parlor. And, now by the utterance of a few choice words, you and you alone have devastated all concerned. I think you have made it our business.

LEROY: Don't pay any attention to him, Ted. I'm a pastor. Maybe I can help you with this problem.

DOMINIC: And help me with mine. My reputation hangs in the balance.

DEACON BOB: Is that all you are concerned with? Your reputation? You cynical sycophant!

DOMINIC: Philistine!

LEROY: Stop it, both of you. Shut up just long enough for this man to have his say. It is obvious you and Bobbie June are in a lot of pain over this issue.

TED: You have no idea. Look, when Bobbie June had Chrissy, she went into a depression. In fact, she had to go into the hospital for a while and when she came out, she just couldn't handle being a mother.

I didn't know what to do. She never out and out told me to go, but it was obvious it would be best for Bobbie June, if Chrissy and I were no longer around. Then, she could handle life better.

So, we left. We gave her some room and some time. But, I don't think it did any good. Over the years, I've tried to get back in touch with her, but she would never take my calls. She probably threw away all of my letters, too.

LEROY: This changes everything, Ted. You've got to talk to Bobbie June.

TED: It changes nothing. You heard what that other woman said about forgiveness.

LEROY: That woman was to have become my wife. Her name is Madeline.

DEACON BOB: It would change the dynamics of this little situation if Madeline knew the truth.

LEROY: And Madeline would believe Ted over Bobbie June? I don't think so.

TED: Then, what are we to do?

DOMINIC: And the two of you are just going to sit here and devour cream puffs while these two women rule the world? If I were you, I would march right into that back room and sweep both of them off their feet.

TED: It's not that easy, Dominic. I know this may be a loaded question, but have you ever been in love.

DEACON BOB: With a woman?

DOMINIC: Or course I have. There have been women in my life who saw me for the artistic legend I have become. But, there was one in particular. (*Dreamy eyed.*) One woman. A long time ago. In a galaxy far, far away. She renounced me. So, I no longer need love. All I need is my art, my work.

LEROY: Planning weddings? You don't need love yet you plan weddings?

DOMINIC: I found my niche. If I can't be happy I might as well help other people be happy.

DEACON BOB: You are indeed a hypocrite, my good Dominic. As we all are. You speak of love and yet, you cannot find it in your heart to forgive the women in your life. Perhaps the two of you (referring to Leroy and Ted) can find it in your heart to forgive the women in your lives before you end up a pedantic caterer like Dominic.

DOMINIC: That's far enough Dr. Phil. I'm not getting involved in this little circle of misery. Unless Bad, Bad Leroy Brown here gets off his bottom and wins back the affection of Madeline, I've got lots of trays to take back to the caterer. So, Leroy and Deacon Bob, you are going to help me move this stuff back into my van while Ted here decides how to best tackle this dilemma.

LEROY: I've got nowhere else to go. (*They exit.*)

ACT 2

SCENE 3

(The women return on stage right.)

MADELINE: I know you don't want to do this, Bobbie June, but I'm worried about Mary, I mean Chrissy.

DOSSIE: Yeah, you need to go and talk to Ted. Find out where Chrissy is.

MADELINE: Then, you can tell him to hit the road and never come back.

BOBBIE JUNE: But, I don't want to talk to him.

(Ted rises from table.)

TED: Bobbie June, will you let me talk to you? Please?

MADELINE: You should have thought of that when you ran off.

TED: I didn't run off. Bobbie June, tell them I didn't run off.

DOSSIE: Of course you did. You kidnapped Chrissy and ran off to Canada.

TED: I can't believe you told them that story, Bobbie June. I've never kidnapped anyone.

MADELINE: Stop your lying, Ted.

TED: I'm not lying. Look, here's the letter she sent me the night I left town. I tried to talk to her but she locked herself in the Tea Room. She refused to come out. She wouldn't listen to me.

DOSSIE: Give me that. *(She snatches letter.)* Well, it is obvious this is a forgery.

MADELINE: *(Looking at letter.)* Bobbie June would never say anything like this.

TED: *(Quoting letter.)* Dear Ted. I don't know if I love you or Chrissy anymore. I can't go on living like this. I need some time to think. Please give me a chance to work this out on my own.

MADELINE: So, you memorized it. Big deal! I'm sure you read this letter to Chrissy many times.

TED: I never told her about the letter. Instead, I told her how much her mother loved her. I know that Bobbie June couldn't help what she said. She was sick and she needed help.

DOSSIE: That's enough, Ted. You are so cruel to lie to your own child like that.

BOBBIE JUNE: He's not lying, Dossie Marie.

DOSSIE: What?

BOBBIE JUNE: I remember now. I wrote this letter. It's all coming back to me.

MADELINE: Wait a minute! You mean he's telling the truth?

BOBBIE JUNE: Yes. I'm sorry, Madeline.

MADELINE: Sorry don't cut the mustard. I've got a fiancé who just walked out because I called off a wedding because we got in a fight.

DOSSIE MARIE: Then, we better go find him, Madeline.

(Madeline and Dossie Marie exit.)

TED: Please sit down and talk to me Bobbie June. I've come a long way for this.

BOBBIE JUNE: *(Sits at table.)* Why did you come back?

TED: Chrissy wanted me to. She found that letter.

BOBBIE JUNE: This letter? Oh, my what must she think of me?

TED: I explained it to her. I told her about your illness and how I took her so that you would be out from under the pressure.

BOBBIE JUNE: Is that really why you left?

TED: I hoped that by leaving you alone for a while, you would get better.

BOBBIE JUNE: What have I done, Ted? I don't remember all of this very well. It's all a blur. I convinced myself you were to blame. What must Chrissy think?

TED: So Chrissy has been here?

BOBBIE JUNE: Yes. She showed up and said she'd been in a car wreck and had suffered from amnesia. She doesn't remember any of this.

TED: What? When she left my house she wanted to come and meet you. Alone. She was going to call for me if things went well. When I didn't hear I decided to come anyway.

BOBBIE JUNE: Ted, what was I thinking so many years ago?

TED: Bobbie June, we all make decisions we regret. Who knows what you were thinking. Your depression had your mind so clouded. You made decisions based on your feelings.

BOBBIE JUNE: I thought you had met someone else. I thought you had moved on with your life. I guess my emotions fooled me.

TED: Bobbie June, I have loved only one woman in my life. I have never loved another. I asked God to give me patience to wait for the day you would get better. I hoped you might want to at least have Chrissy come home. You know, it's kind of hard to raise a young woman when there's not another woman around the house. You should have seen me trying to teach her how to put makeup on.

BOBBIE JUNE: Oh, Ted. I can't believe this. What is she going to think when her memory returns?

TED: Maybe we can explain it to her. Help her understand the circumstances you were under.

BOBBIE JUNE: You said WE could explain it. There is no WE, Ted.

TED: Bobbie June, I know it's hard for you to think about this, but maybe we could at least become friends again. At least for Chrissy's sake. What do you say?

BOBBIE JUNE: Ted, how could you possibly want to become friends again after what I did?

TED: Maybe I'm hoping for more than just friendship.

BOBBIE JUNE: Oh, my, I sit here and think about how Leroy has forgiven Madeline for her past. And I think about how Chrissy would have to forgive me for my past and I wonder how we could ever get past the hurt. I don't know what to say, Ted. This is all so much to take in.

TED: I'll give you some space and time. I won't pressure you. Except to say this one thing, I forgive you.

(Madeline and Leroy come back in, arm in arm followed by Dominic.)

MADELINE: Leroy, I am so sorry we fought like that.

LEROY: Madeline, my little honey bun, it's OK. I'm sure they'll be many more where that came from. We can't let a little spat spoil our love for each other.

DOMINIC: *(Belches face coated with creme.)* Does this mean I have to find some more cream puffs?

DEACON BOB: Buford, get up from that table. You and Crockett have a job to do.

BUFORD: What's that?

DEACON BOB: Go find some super glue.

CROCKETT: Super glue?

DEACON BOB: There will be nuptials tomorrow and the two of you have a crystal podium to glue back together.

(Everyone exits. Rupert Whitley enters and looks around with a puzzled expression on his face.)

WHITLEY: Is anyone here?

(Nancy Neon enters.)

NANCY: I am, Mr. Whitley.

WHITLEY: You are the one who asked me to meet you here? I thought Bobbie June had changed her mind about closing her shop.

NANCY: Oh, no. I was the one who wanted to speak with you. I thought I would still be here interviewing the Reverend.

WHITLEY: I have already given you an exclusive interview, Ms. Neon.

NANCY: That is true, Mr. Whitley. But, this is off the record.

WHITLEY: Off the record?

NANCY: You see, you and I have a mutual goal in mind.

WHITLEY: I can't imagine anything you would want that would interest me.

NANCY: Now, Mr. Whitley, isn't it true that if anyone breaks the terms of Mr. Cheatwood's will that they would not receive part of the estate?

WHITLEY: Yes, assuming we do not find any living relative.

NANCY: Living relative? Mr. Cheatwood's wife and daughter are both long gone. There is no one left to receive the money except for those who agreed to follow the stipulations of the will. *(Pause.)* And, of course, you.

WHITLEY: Me?

NANCY: I've seen the will, Mr. Whitley. I know about your little secret.

WHITLEY: That is not generally known knowledge.

NANCY: And I will refrain from broadcasting that juicy little tidbit as long as you help me out. You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours.

WHITLEY: And just what did you have in mind, Ms. Neon?

NANCY: Let's say that while I was rummaging around in the courthouse records looking for a copy of Mr. Cheatwood's will I found something else.

(She takes out a piece of paper.)

WHITLEY: What is this?

NANCY: An outstanding loan on her property taken out by her husband Ted years ago. Bobbie June probably never found out about it. But, the loan was cosigned by none other than Lazarus Cheatwood. Now, technically that means Mr. Cheatwood owns a piece of Bobbie June's property.

WHITLEY: *(Glances at paper.)* A very small piece of the property. This outstanding loan is for a pittance.

NANCY: Ah, but the will says that every business must shut down if it is owned by Mr. Cheatwood in whole *or in part* or the estate is not divided among the businesses. And, Mr. Whitley, I have read the fine print. I know what you are up to. Your little secret is that if any business violates the will, any business at all, the entire estate is not divided and *you* get it all.

WHITLEY: Ms. Neon, you should have pursued a career in law instead of the media.

NANCY: Sometimes I think we're not all that different.

WHITLEY: So, what did you have in mind?

NANCY: Tomorrow just before the wedding is consummated while the bride and groom are standing at the altar I want you to stop the proceedings and inform everyone that the will has been violated.

WHITLEY: There is legal precedence, I must admit. However, this document is somewhat suspect and may have a hard time standing up in court.

NANCY: I'm just concerned with the wedding. I don't want it to happen. And *(She cozies up to Whitley.)*

I'm sure a man of your legal acumen can handle any court challenge to the will. After all, Bobbie June will have openly violated the will by allowing a wedding to occur in her place of business.

WHITLEY: I suppose I should try and inform her of this.

NANCY: You've already spoken to her about shutting down her business, haven't you?

WHITLEY: Yes.

NANCY: Then, isn't she considered suitably informed?

WHITLEY: I suppose so.

NANCY: Good. Well, I will see you at the wedding.

WHITLEY: I wouldn't miss it for the world.

ACT 3
SCENE 1

MADELINE: (*Dressed in wedding dress stage right.*) Where is she? Mary is my maid of honor and we can't go on without her.

DOSSIE: I don't know, Madeline. No one has seen her since day before yesterday. Even Ted hasn't seen her since he got to town.

MADELINE: She ran off. We made such a fuss over her and acted like such fools she ran off.

BOBBIE JUNE: If she knew I was her mother and she knew what I really did to Ted, I can't blame her for never talking to me for the rest of my life.

HATTIE: (*Enters dressed to the nines in a gorgeous dress. She is obviously totally different from before.*) Well, girls, I just wanted to wish Madeline good luck one last time.

MADELINE: Who are you?

DOSSIE: Hattie? Hattie Mae?

BOBBIE JUNE: What did you do to yourself?

HATTIE: I gave in to the inevitable and decided to become a respected citizen of Bayou City again.

MADELINE: But, but, but . . .

HATTIE: I know. It's hard to believe all of this beauty was buried beneath those rags.

BOBBIE JUNE: Why? Why did you dress like that and sleep on the streets?

HATTIE: I've never spent a single night on the streets, Bobbie June.

MADELINE: Then where did you sleep?

HATTIE: At home.

MADELINE: You have a house?

BOBBIE JUNE: You said yesterday you didn't have a house.

HATTIE: Well, technically, I don't. I've spent the last few years . . .

DOSSIE: In the Cheatwood Mansion.

BOBBIE JUNE: What?

DOSSIE: She said "a respected citizen, AGAIN." Don't you understand? She's Old Man Cheatwood's long lost daughter.

MADELINE: I thought she was dead. Why would Hattie Mae act like a bag lady if she was that crazy Old Man Cheatwood's daughter?

DOSSIE: Are we right, Hattie Mae?

HATTIE: You have discovered my secret, Dossie.

DOSSIE: It's an inborn talent.

MADELINE: But, if you were Old Man Cheatwood's daughter, why did you pretend to be homeless? He's got all kinds of money.

HATTIE: I didn't really want to talk about all of this.

BOBBIE JUNE: Too late. You showed up in that dress and you expect people not to talk?

HATTIE: Well, the truth is my father kept me locked up in the attic.

DOSSIE: How cruel. Why did he do that?

HATTIE: My mother developed mental problems after I was born and my father put her in an asylum. I guess he just didn't know what to do with me so he figured I be safe if I was locked away from the world.

BOBBIE JUNE: You must have been miserable all alone in that attic.

HATTIE MAE: I wasn't always alone. My father would have supper with me every night. So, after a while I found a way to sneak out of the house. But, I realized people might recognize me as Maybelle Cheatwood, the daughter of the richest man in town. So, I pretended to be homeless. A crazy old bad lady. I'd wander the streets by day and be back in the attic by sunset.

DOSSIE: I suspected something was up with you when you pulled that stone throwing stunt on us. You knew what you were doing all the time.

HATTIE: I did pretend to be crazy. It helped. But, there was a time when I wasn't pretending. I really was crazy.

BOBBIE JUNE: (*Puts a hand on Hattie Mae's shoulder.*) You can tell us about it, Hattie Mae. We want to help you. Trust me, talking about your past helps clear the air. It did for Ted and me.

HATTIE: (*Pats Bobbie June's hand and studies them one by one.*) You really want to know?

MADELINE: Yes.

HATTIE: And you won't laugh at me?

DOSSIE: We promise.

HATTIE: One night I sneaked out of the house and went down to Dossie Marie's birthday party. It was when she turned eighteen.

DOSSIE: You were at my birthday party?

HATTIE: Yes, I was. But, I couldn't come inside with all the other kids. I was afraid my father found out, he would put me in that asylum. So, I climbed up in a tree and watched through the window while everyone had such a good time. I was actually enjoying myself. Until, the limb broke.

I fell out of the tree and landed on something soft. When I got up, I found out my cushion was a boy. He had seen me leave my father's mansion lots of times and he had been following me. I was afraid I'd broken his ribs and I tried to run away but he stopped me. He told me he wasn't hurt and we became friends.

He was so sweet. Over time I fell in love with him. And, six months later we ran off and got married.

My father found out and tracked us down. My father took my husband away. Later, he came back with a letter from Cooter.

DOSSIE: Cooter?

HATTIE: He was a coot all right. In the letter he admitted he had wanted to marry me only for my father's money. Well, it didn't matter to me why he married me. But, my father made us stay apart and a week later, Cooter jumped off the Jimmy Davis Bridge in Shreveport. My father showed me the suicide note. Cooter said he couldn't handle the guilt and he wanted to end his life.

MADELINE: That's horrible! No wonder you felt like you were going crazy.

HATTIE: I went a little crazy after that. I think my father put me in the asylum for a while. I don't remember what happened for a long time. One day, I just woke up all alone in the attic and realized that as long as Lazarus Cheatwood was alive, I would never have a life. So, I created a new life as Hattie Mae the homeless bag lady.

BOBBIE JUNE: Now that your father is gone, you've decided to come out of the attic?

HATTIE: Yes, that brute is dead! And, good riddance to him.

BOBBIE JUNE: And I thought I was mad at Ted.

MADELINE: Honey, never underestimate the anger of a woman scorned.

HATTIE MAE: You know, at first, I was so glad he was dead. But, over the past two days watching what you three have gone through, I'm realizing bitterness and anger can destroy you. It'll be hard, but I have to forgive my father and get on with my life.

BOBBIE JUNE: I don't think I could do such a thing.

HATTIE: If Ted can try to come home and ask for forgiveness then maybe I can find a new life, too.

ACT 3
SCENE 2

(Dominic comes in.)

DOMINIC: Madeline darling, the flowers are wilting and we really must get this show on the road. And, my, my just who is this lovely lady?

HATTIE: *(Looks at him strangely.)* Just a minute. Do I know you?

DOMINIC: Perhaps you have seen me on the cover of Gourmet magazine?

HATTIE: No, I recognize your eyes. And your voice. It can't be! He did it to me! Again!

BOBBIE JUNE: Who?

HATTIE: My father! Why does it surprise me? He lied to me all my life! Why didn't I see he was lying about this?

MADELINE: Lying about what?

HATTIE: He's Cooter.

DOMINIC: Excuse me?

HATTIE: Cooter, it's me, Maybelle. Maybelle Cheatwood.

DOMINIC: I don't know what you're talking about. My name is not Cooter.

HATTIE: Wait, don't you recognize me? Look into my eyes. Here, *(she takes his hand.)* Hold my hand. I'm Maybelle. Your wife.

DOMINIC: No, it can't be! Your father said you had died in the insane asylum. Right after you sent me away.

HATTIE: I never sent you away.

MADELINE: Hold on a second! He's Cooter?

HATTIE: Cooter Lamar Caskey.

BOBBIE JUNE: He's the boy you married? I thought you said he jumped off a bridge?

DOMINIC: Jumped off a bridge? How boorish! I would never jump off a bridge. If I wanted to do harm to myself, I'd do something more poetic. *(He looks at Hattie.)* Your father told you I jumped off a bridge?

HATTIE: Yes. What did he tell you about me?

DOMINIC: *(Pulls away.)* I was gone to the store to buy you some flowers for our one week anniversary. This huge black limousine pulled up and your father motioned for me to get in. He showed me a letter you had written asking for the marriage to be annulled. In the letter, you said you had made a mistake marrying a common, no good redneck.

Your father was apologetic and said you had a nervous breakdown after writing the letter and he had to have you committed. He then offered me a large sum of money as "recompense" he said.

I didn't want his money. I wanted my wife. He told me to leave town and find a new life. He offered me a bus ticket and I took it.

(Turns back to Hattie.)

I wrote you letters for months and you never wrote me back. Finally, I got a letter from your father that you had died.

Oh, Maybelle, you don't know the pain I went through. I thought you didn't love me anymore. The bitterness and hatred gripped me. I ended up in a place for homeless and that's where I met Madeline.

I was bitter, broken, angry. At you. You rejected me. You turned your back on me. So, I recreated myself. I became Dominic Flambeaux, the wedding planner.

HATTIE: Cooter, I'm so sorry. My father has ruined both our lives. He told me you were dead.

DOMINIC: If your father weren't dead, I'd kill him!

DOSSIE: Now, wait a minute. All that is in the past. Do you realize you two have found each other again?

BOBBIE JUNE: Dossie's right. You've gotten a second chance.

MADELINE: Dominic,

(She puts her hand on his shoulder.)

When I was going through all the pain and suffering in California, you gave me hope. Let me give some hope back to you. The good Lord has seen fit to bring you two back together. Don't let the past destroy your second chance.

BOBBIE JUNE: And, I've decided to try and make things work with Ted again. He has forgiven me. We've got a second chance, too. Don't let Old Man Cheatwood reach from beyond the grave and take away this new future that the two of you can have.

DOMINIC: But, I'm not Cooter anymore. I'm Dominic Flambeaux.

HATTIE: And, I'm not Hattie Mae anymore. I'm Maybelle Cheatwood. *(She takes his hand.)* But, I married Cooter, not Dominic.

DOMINIC: *(Blinks and looks down at her hand.)* Just call me Cooter.

MADELINE: *(Looks at Dossie Marie.)* You got any surprises up your sleeve? You're the only one who hasn't had a revelation today.

DOSSIE: Nothing in my life has changed.

BOBBIE JUNE: You haven't quoted Rudy in over 24 hours.

DOSSIE: So?

MADELINE: So, maybe there is a new man in your life.

DOSSIE: I don't think so.

BOBBIE JUNE: I've seen the way you look at him.

DOSSIE: Who?

MADELINE: The only man we know who could outquote Rudy.

DOSSIE: I don't know what you're talking about.

BOBBIE JUNE: Madeline, tell Dossie what you have been saying for the past two days about forgiveness.

MADELINE: The same thing you have. If Leroy can forgive me . . .

HATTIE: And I can forgive my father.

BOBBIE JUNE: And, Ted can forgive me.

DOSSIE: Then what?

BOBBIE JUNE: Then you can overlook Deacon Bob's inadequacies.

DOSSIE: Deacon Bob? I'd as soon go out with Buford.

MADELINE: That can be arranged. You know what Dossie Marie? I think it is only fitting that you and Deacon Bob could spend the rest of your lives together. You deserve each other. Just think of all the new sayings you'll be able to come up with.

DOSSIE: That is the most ridiculous thing . . . I mean, why in the world would I want to . . . I mean . . . Deacon Bob? (*Seems to be thinking about it and shrugs.*) Well, as my dear departed Rudy once said, "Whatever."

BOBBIE JUNE: OK, can we get on with the ceremony?

MADELINE: What about Mary, or Chrissy, or whoever she is?

HATTIE: I talked to Mary just a little while ago.

BOBBIE JUNE: You did?

HATTIE: Yes, she should be here by now. So I suggest we just get this show on the road.

ACT 3

SCENE 3

(Nancy Neon and Rupert Whitley come in and have a seat. Buford and Crockett come in carrying a pulpit that is wrapped in duct tape. They place it center stage.)

CROCKETT: Where we going to sit, Buford?

BUFORD: I want to sit where I can hear Miss Dixie Lou when she sings.

CROCKETT: Then, I'm sitting on the other side of the room. What do you have in that bag?

BUFORD: *(Pulls out a huge bag of rice.)* It's rice to throw at the bride and groom.

CROCKETT: You going to share some of that after opening it up?

BUFORD: You're supposed to take it out of the bag before you throw it?

CROCKETT: Buford, sit down before you hurt somebody.

BUFORD: Reckon they'll mind if we play dominos until the bride comes in?

(Dixie Lou, Rowena Louise, and Lindy Lorraine come in and go stand by the piano.)

DIXIE LOU: OK, girls, let's warm up before the bride gets here.

ROWENA: But, I'm not cold.

LINDY: She's talking about our voices.

DIXIE LOU: Let's do some fa la las. *(She hits a note on the piano.)*

Fa. *(Just a wee bit sharp.)*

ROWENA: How far?

LINDY: She's not saying far. She's saying "fa".

ROWENA: What's she saying "fa" for?

LINDY: Because it comes before "la". You can't say "la" until you say "fa".

DIXIE LOU: Let's just sing "do re mi".

ROWENA: "Doe ray you?"

LINDY: Not “you”. “Mi”.

ROWENA: Doe ray me?

DIXIE LOU: That’s better. We’ll do the “do re mi” after the “fa la la.” Now repeat after me.

ROWENA: Now, repeat after me.

DIXIE LOU: No. Wait until I say “fa”.

ROWENA: No. Wait until I say “fa”.

DIXIE LOU: Rowena, you’re driving me crazy.

ROWENA: Rowena, you’re diving me crazy.

LINDY: Hold it, hold it! That’s enough!

ROWENA: Wait a minute! I remember what she said.

DIXIE LOU: What?

ROWENA: I repeated what you said. I remembered. Dixie Lou, I am healed. My short term memory loss is gone.

LINDY: You must have gotten your chemistry set back into balance. Now, can we get on with our warm up?

ROWENA: Sure. Fa, la, la. See, I can remember it.

(She hits a particularly high and off key note. Everyone in the room notices and covers their ears. Deacon Bob hurries over.)

DEACON BOB: Although I prefer the Renaissance music of the Rococo, since it is not my nuptials we are about to celebrate, I can not request that you three lotharios sing a more appropriate musical selection. However, since I am the minister in charge of this grand affair, I can tell you without hesitation to shut up and sit down.

(Madeline is standing stage right, looking around for Mary. Mary appears stage left and hurries across the stage.)

MADELINE: There you are! I’ve been looking for you for two days!

MARY: Madeline, I'm sorry I was running late. Armando helped me with a little chore and we ran a little late.

ARMANDO: But, my dear sweet Madeline, although I did not get to hang your drapes, your wedding is going to be very special. Isn't it my love?

MARY: Yes. Armando, be seated over there so I can march in.

ARMANDO: Anything you say, my dear.

MADELINE: I was beginning to think we'd finally run you off. I thought maybe we upset you.

MARY: Madeline, you didn't upset me. I wouldn't miss this day for anything. No, I was working on something very special. A little surprise. But, it can wait until after your vows.

MADELINE: OK, now that you're here, we can get this thing going.

(As Mary walks out to the wedding march ahead of Madeline.)

WHITLEY: You have the document?

NANCY: Right here. As soon as they ask if anyone should have an objection, be very lawyerly and object.

WHITLEY: You are a nasty one, aren't you?

NANCY: Never underestimate the anger of a woman scorned.

(Wedding march begins and Madeline enters. Goes Center stage facing audience and we have the typical wedding stuff.)

DEACON BOB: . . . And, now, if there is anyone present who knows any reason why these two should not be joined in holy matrimony let him speak now or forever hold his peace.

WHITLEY: I object.

(Everyone turns.)

DEACON BOB: You object? This is not a court of law.

WHITLEY: Nevertheless, I cannot allow these proceedings to continue. Under the provisions of Mr. Lazarus Cheatwood's will, no business owned all or in part by him shall conduct business while he lies in state in the church.

BOBBIE JUNE: Wait a minute! Old Man Cheatwood doesn't own my shop!

WHITLEY: Bobbie June, you are wrong. Your husband took out a loan from Lazarus Cheatwood on your property years ago.

BOBBIE JUNE: (*Looks at Ted.*) What? You took out a loan on the Tea Room?

TED: A loan? I seem to remember taking out a small loan. It was when you were pregnant with Chrissy and we were having trouble making ends meet. But . . .

BOBBIE JUNE: You took out a loan and never told me?

TED: Things weren't going very well, Bobbie June. We needed the extra money and . . .

BOBBIE JUNE: And I was just beginning to trust you again.

WHITLEY: I rest my case. This wedding is hereby cancelled and all provisions of Mr. Cheatwood's will are rendered void and null. All property owners in the township of Bayou City previously owned by Lazarus Cheatwood now belong to his estate and the property does not revert back to its original owners. And, since there are no living relatives, as executor of Mr. Cheatwood's will I will now be the owner and proprietor of such properties.

HATTIE: Just a moment, Mr. Whitley.

WHITLEY: Who are you?

HATTIE: You know me as Hattie Mae.

NANCY: You're Hattie Mae? The old crazy biddy in town?

HATTIE: Yes, Nancy, I am. But that is not my real name. My real name is Maybelle Cheatwood.

WHITLEY: What?

HATTIE: (*She rummages in her purse and takes out a piece of paper.*)

My birth certificate. I am the legal heir of Lazarus Cheatwood. I saw you at the courthouse, Nancy Neon, and I figured you were going to try something to stop this wedding but I never thought it would be this.

I was ready to stop old Whitley here from executing the will before the wedding so we could have it in the church but Madeline seemed so much happier to have it here I put my birth certificate away.

MADELINE: Wait a minute! What is going on here? Nancy, you did this to stop my wedding?

NANCY: Yes, I did. You don't deserve the good reverend.

MADELINE: And you do? Oh, I ought to . . . , I mean I should . . . , well,

(Looks at Leroy and Bobbie June and Dossie Marie and her eyes come to rest on Mary. She takes a deep breath and finds calm.)

Nancy, there was a time when I would have taken a two by four and beat the living daylights out of you for what you've done. But, now, that doesn't matter to me anymore. I've found forgiveness and unconditional love and that is something you can never take away from me. No matter what you try, Leroy and I love each other.

LEROY: That's right. God has brought us together and nothing can separate us from our love for each other.

MADELINE: So you see, Nancy, I don't have it in my heart to get revenge for what you've done. I just feel real sorry for you. And, for this cold heartless Mr. Whitley here. It seems both of your schemes have failed.

HATTIE: I am the rightful heir to my father's estate and I intend on giving all of the businesses back to their original owners.

WHITLEY: Well, we shall see about that, Hattie Mae. I will challenge the validity of your identity.

HATTIE: Fine, I'll see you in court. But, for now, I suggest you and Miss Nancy Neon here get out of this Tea Room. We have a wedding to finish.

(They exit.)

And, as Hattie Mae would have said, "Hallelujah."

MADELINE: Hattie Mae, I mean Maybelle, thank you so much.

HATTIE: You're welcome. Now, Bobbie June, don't get too mad at Ted for something that happened years ago. It all worked out in the end.

TED: Bobbie June, what I was trying to say is I paid off that loan. Long ago. I've got the cancelled loan papers somewhere at my house in Canada. Old Man Cheatwood probably overlooked the loan papers at the courthouse.

BOBBIE JUNE: Ted, I'm so sorry for doubting you. Can you forgive me? Again?

MARY: If he can't I know someone who can.

MADELINE: What?

MARY: Before we conclude today's ceremony, I have a surprise.

MARY: Bobbie June, I found out that before Ted showed up, Chrissy came looking for you first.

BOBBIE JUNE: So, you are Chrissy?

MARY: No, I'm not. I've been busy the past few months trying to track down your daughter. About a month ago, I heard from Chrissy. She's been trying to decide whether or not you would want her to contact you.

MADELINE: What? So you are my daughter?

MARY: Just a minute Madeline. Chrissy, come in here.

(Chrissy comes in and goes to Bobbie June.)

CHRISSY: Hello, Mom.

BOBBIE JUNE: Oh, Chrissy, you've come back to me.

CHRISSY: I heard from Mary a few weeks ago and I decided to help her find the other daughters. I've missed you. I want to get to know you.

BOBBIE JUNE: Even after all I did?

CHRISSY: I heard something just a little while ago about forgiveness? Let's start new, fresh, right now.

(They embrace.)

BOBBIE JUNE: So, did you find the other daughter?

MARY: Well, yes. Madeline, I found your daughter.

MADELINE: What?

MARY: Dawn, come out here.

DAWN: Hello, Madeline.

MADELINE: You're my daughter?

DAWN: So Mary tells me.

MADELINE: How can you even come here and stand to have me in your presence? I gave you away as a baby.

DAWN: You did what you thought was right. I've had a wonderful life, Madeline. But, I've always wondered who my real mother was. I've always wanted to get to know you. When I found out I was adopted my mother told me that you must have loved me very much to give me up to someone who could be a better mother to me. I didn't understand that at first. But, over time I realized you did what you thought was best for me. True love is sacrificial, Madeline. I've learned all about that kind of love from Jesus.

MADELINE: Dawn, thank you for being so understanding.

DAWN: And, I'd like to get to know you. Once you get back from your honeymoon.

DOSSIE: So, that means you are my Lydia? I told you all along she was my daughter.

MARY: Not exactly, Dossie Marie. Lydia, come out here.

(Lydia comes out.)

DOSSIE: What? You're not Lydia?

LYDIA: Hello, mother.

DOSSIE: Lydia? Is that you?

LYDIA: Yes, I've decided to come home. Mary tracked me down and told me that you wanted me to come home.

DOSSIE: You actually want to come home to a mother who doesn't even remember your face?

LYDIA: The hatred ran both ways, Mom. I hated you so much for what you said to me that day. I hated you and I wanted to hurt you by running away. But, all I really did was hurt myself. All these years I've lived in bitterness and hatred of you. And, I don't even remember what it was we got mad about.

DOSSIE: Neither do I

LYDIA: What? You don't remember either?

DOSSIE: No. Lydia, can you ever forgive me for saying whatever it is I said?

LYDIA: Only if you can forgive me for running off.

DOSSIE: Who could blame you after the fight we had.

LYDIA: I'm glad you want me to come back home. We've got a lot of time to make up.

MADELINE: Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Mary, if you're not Chrissy, or Dawn, or Lydia, who are you?

MARY: Well, it's a long story and it's a story that I only just remembered. I've lived most of my life in and out of foster homes. I wasn't exactly the best child either. No one could stand me for more than a year or so. I kept getting bounced from one family to the next until I could make them get rid of me. Then, about a year ago one of my former foster parents sent me something I had received in the mail. It was the title sheet from a Family Bible that said my mother got married to the man of her dreams only to find out he committed suicide a week after the wedding.

HATTIE: What?

MARY: After the death of her husband, my mother, who was very young, became depressed and distraught and was confined by her father to a mental institution. While she was there, she found out she was pregnant but her mind was gone and she never knew she had a child.

HATTIE: She never knew?

MARY: While she was in the asylum, a kindly older woman took care of her and helped her through her pregnancy. This older woman saw that the mother delivered her baby and was upset when I was given to a foster home. I tracked down all this information when I managed to locate the rest of the Bible. This old family Bible.

HATTIE: Where did you find it?

MARY: Chrissy found it for me. She tracked it down to an apartment building and sent it to me in the mail. I had to go to that place and see for myself. And, Armando helped me.

ARMANDO: I had done the drapes for the new apartments and I remembered there was an old library in the middle of the building complex. The windows were very nasty and I had to cover them with a dense velvet drape with golden tassels.

MARY: The apartment complex had once been an insane asylum. Hattie Mae or Maybelle, whatever your name is, this Bible has a complete record of what you went through while you were in that asylum put there by your father after the death of your husband. The older woman wrote it all down but your father refused to take this Bible when you came home from the asylum and never told you about your baby. He locked you up in the attic of his old house and you never knew you and your husband had a child.

HATTIE: Who was the older woman?

MARY: Your mother. She was put in the asylum by your father. But, she never suffered. She ministered to all the people there. She turned something terrible into a wonderful opportunity to take care of others because she realized your father would see to it she never left. When you arrived, she said in her writings, that God had brought you back to her in your hour of need. Everything is here, written in the margins and blank pages of this Bible. Your mother looked after you, Maybelle. She took care of you and your baby.

HATTIE: Then you are my daughter?

MARY: Yes.

HATTIE: Oh, my. I don't know what to think. All those years in the attic I knew there was someone out there who loved me. It almost drove me crazy.

MARY: There was someone out there. Two someones. Me. And your mother.

HATTIE: What happened to my mother?

MARY: She died right before the asylum was closed down and converted into apartments.

HATTIE: When I saw that baby picture six months ago I knew there was something special about you. I knew you weren't the daughter of Bobbie June, or Madeline, or Dossie Marie. I had no idea I was your mother.

MARY: And, I had no idea you were Maybelle Cheatwood until now.

HATTIE: *(They hug.)* Oh, this is more than one person can take. God has been so good to me. He has brought me my heart's desire.

MARY: Mine, too. I only wish I could have known my father.

HATTIE: Oh, you can know your father.

MARY: What?

HATTIE: He's not dead.

MARY: He's not? Where is he?

HATTIE: Right here. *(Points to Dominic.)*

MARY: *(Less than enthusiastic.)* Oh! You're kidding!

DOMINIC: Honey, you can join the family business. Between you and Armando, we can make some killer drapes.

ARMANDO: *(To Mary.)* See, I told you we were destined to be together. We shall have a lifetime together hanging drapes.

MARY: Well, it's better than living in a foster home. *(They embrace.)*

DEACON BOB: Well, now that everyone has rediscovered the love of their life and now that we have all been taught a powerful lesson by Almighty God about the power of love and forgiveness, without further ado, I now pronounce you man and wife.

(Madeline and Leroy kiss.)

DIXIE LOU: Come on girls. It's time to sing our song.

LINDY: We have practiced and practiced and we are ready to sing "The Hawaiian Wedding Song".

ROWENA: And, I've got my chemistry set back. Now what are we singing? Hawaiian Punch Song?

DIXIE LOU: Honey, just follow along.

(They start trying to sing and it is awful.)

MADELINE: Stop! Stop! Dixie Lou this is atrocious.

DIXIE LOU: Well, I can't help it since we don't have any instruments to accompany us.

LINDY: She said atrocious, not accapella.

DIXIE LOU: *(Starts to cry)* I'm so sorry we don't sound too good, Madeline. I just wanted to do something for your wedding.

MADELINE: *(Hugs her.)* Dixie Lou, it's the thought that counts.

DIXIE LOU: I just wish that you could hear the song like I hear it in my head. Listen. Can you hear it?

DOSSIE: You've got the volume turned too low.

DIXIE LOU: *(Speaking louder.)* How about now? Doesn't it sound just like Elvis?

(Elvis Presley comes in. Dixie Lou reacts.)

ELVIS: Somebody looking for me?

DIXIE LOU: Elvis Presley? I have just died and gone to heaven.

ELVIS: I was on my way to Las Vegas and the bus broke down. Now, what were you three little chickadees trying to sing?

ROWENA: Hawaiian Love Song.

DIXIE LOU: For our good friend on the occasion of her union in holy matrimony.

ELVIS: Well, how about I give it a try. (*Sings Hawaiian Wedding Song while everyone hugs and mugs for the audience.*)